DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 274 371 IR 051 662

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TITLE Multi-Database Searching in Forensic Psychology.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bibliographic Utilities; Comparative Analysis; Databases; Indexing; *Online Searching; Online Vendors; *Relevance (Information Retrieval); *Search Strategies; *User Needs (Information)
IDENTIFIERS DIALOG; *Forensic Psychology; Multi Database Searching

ABSTRACT

Traditional library skills have been augmented since the introduction of online computerized database services. Because of the complexity of the field, forensic psychology can benefit enormously from the application of comprehensive bibliographic search strategies. The study reported here demonstrated the bibliographic results obtained when a multi-database online research strategy was performed on the DIALINDEX system with the DIALOG service. As illustrated in two examples, the findings clearly indicate that such a search strategy produces superior results when compared to searches of single databases such as PsycINFO. The implications of the results are discussed, and the utility of multi-database searching for the specialty of forensic psychology is stressed. Results of the sample searches are included in two tables and references are provided. (Author/KM)

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ED274371

Multi-Database Searching in Forensic Psychology

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Running head: MULTI-DATABASE SEARCHING

IR051662

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Abstract

Traditional library skills have been augmented since the introduction of online computerized database services. Due to the complexity of the field, forensic psychology can benefit enormously from the application of comprehensive bibliographic search strategies. The present study demonstrated the bibliographic results obtained when a multi-database online research strategy was performed on the DIALINDEX system with the DIALOG service. As illustrated in two examples, the findings clearly indicated that such a search strategy produced superior results when compared to single database searches, such as PsycINFO. The implications of the results were discussed and the utility of multi-database searching for the specialty of forensic psychology was stressed.

Multi-Database Searching in Forensic Psychology

Computerized online database searching is considered a critical adjunct in the information acquisition process (Lewis, 1986; Perry & Dana, 1985; Piotrowski & Perdue, in press). This research retrieval strategy is most relevant to the specialty of forensic psychology since bibliographic data must be accessed from the broad areas of law and human behavior (Knapp, Vandecreek, & Zirkel, 1985). Obviously, with the proliferation of online computerized systems, research strategies have also become more intricate, sophisticated and challenging (Mahoney, 1983). The current article attempts to bring some attention to the enormity of this challenge and, it is hoped, provide some effective approaches and suggestions for forensic-psychology researchers. Since over a dozen "forensic" publications are currently indexed as source journals in PsycINFO, the unwary researcher dealing with psychology/law issues may rely on research retrieval via the PsycINFO database alone; PsycINFO is considered a primary bibliographic source for forensic-psychological literature (see Moore & Finn, 1986). However, this initial retrieval strategy would probably leave the investigator with a false sense of confidence regarding the comprehensiveness of research coverage. Considering the proliferation of scholarly journals and large number of available computerized databases and online services (e.g., DIALOG, SDC, BRS), the present investigators undertook a multi-database research strategy to determine the effectiveness of such a comprehensive approach in providing bibliographic material on issues of interest to forensic/psychology researchers.

DIALOG, one of the major online services, provides a master index that accesses all the databases that are relevant to various subject categories (e.g., PSYCH, MEDICINE, LAW) and also furnishes the number of "hits" (postings) in databases designated to each subject group. DIALINDEX, the directory that accesses these major subject categories in the DIALOG service was utilized in the present investigation. Two examples relevant in forensic psychology research are illustrated and discussed below.

EXAMPLE 1

A search was designed which utilized the combination of terms CHILD CUSTODY and HOMOSEXUAL or LESBIAN. In order to maximize the number of relevant hits, the search was conducted using certain DIALOG commands that assist in the retrieval process. After these commands were implemented, the search strategy appeared like this: CHILD?(w)CUSTODY/DE,ID,TI and (HOMOSEXUAL?/DE,ID, TI or LESBIAN?/DE,ID,TI). In this strategy the ? serves as a truncation symbol in which the root word is searched as well as all variants of the root word (e.g., children, homosexuality, homosexuals, homosexualism, lesbians, lesbianism, etc.). The (w) symbol requires that the words bound by the symbol must appear in the citation record adjacent to each other in the given order. The suffix commands, DE, ID, TI require that the term being searched is retrieved only if the term is a descriptor, an identifier, or a word from the title of a citation. The "and" command means that concepts are retrieved only if both terms are found in a citation record, and the "or" command retrieves records of either or both concepts.

PSYCH DIALINDEX CATEGORY

The descriptors CHILD CUSTODY and HOMOSEXUAL or LESBIAN were introduced as input terms in the PSYCH and LAW subject categories in DIALINDEX and an online computer search was performed. The PSYCH category includes eight databases (ERIC, SOCIAL SCISEARCH, PsycINFO, SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS, CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT, MENTAL HEALTH ABSTRACTS, PsycALERT, and FAMILY RESOURCES). Table 1 lists the number of postings (N=23) for each of the PSYCH category databases. None of the PsycINFO citations overlapped with any of the other databases; that is, eight references were unique to the PsycINFO database. However, one article entitled "Lesbianism and Motherhood--Implications for Child-Custody" was found to be posted in the SOCIAL SCISEARCH, SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS, MENTAL HEALTH ABSTRACTS, and FAMILY RESOURCES databases but not in PsycINFO. Further analysis revealed that Human Organization (the journal in which this article was published) is not included as a "source" journal in the PsycINFO database.

Of these 23 postings, one other article overlapped with the SOCIAL SCISEARCH and FAMILY RESOURCES databases. Interestingly, one article was initially referenced as a journal article and subsequently was published as a book chapter and cited in MENTAL HEALTH ABSTRACTS. This is not surprising since each database has its own policies regarding 'source' criteria such as books, book chapters, periodicals, monographs, dissertations, special series, and films.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

LAW DIALINDEX CATEGORY

The LAW subject category in DIALINDEX encompasses seven databases, namely, NCJRS, LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX, CHILD ABUSE and NEGLECT, CIS, CRIMINAL JUSTICE PERIODICAL INDEX, PATLAW, and LABORLAW. The search utilizing the descriptors CHILD CUSTODY and HOMOSEXUAL or LESBIAN identified 29 postings across three of the LAW databases, with the majority appearing in CRIMINAL JUSTICE PERIODICAL INDEX (see Table 1). A comparison of all posted citations indicated no overlap of references across these three databases.

The next procedure involved making an overlap comparison of citations between the PSYCH and LAW subject categories. Recall that the PSYCH category yielded a total of 23 postings while the LAW category provided 29 postings (see Table 1). An analysis of these postings revealed that only three citations overlapped both subject categories. Thus, the majority of citations were unique to each subject category. Moreover, as seen from analyses between database comparisons within each subject category, it was evident that the majority of citations are not only unique to individual databases but also to subject categories.

EXAMPLE 2

Since forensic psychologists often deal with legal/medical issues, it seemed prudent that a search strategy be performed that involved medical bibliographic sources. Thus, in addition to the PSYCH and LAW subject categories in DIALINDEX, it seemed apparent that a search of the MEDICINE subject category which contains 17 medically oriented databases might yield pertinent results. Example 2 included the descriptors INSANITY DEFENSE and HOMICIDE or

MURDER and an online search was performed in the PSYCH, LAW, and MEDICINE categories. the command procedure was identical to that discussed in Example 1. The total number of postings for all databases within each subject category were as follows: PSYCH, 18; LAW, 32; MEDICINE, 47 (see Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

DIALINDEX SUBJECT CATEGORY ANALYSES

PSYCH

Of the 18 hits in the PSYCH category, one article, "Myxedema Psychosis-Insanity Defense in Homicide" which appeared in the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 1980, was cited in SOCIAL SCISEARCH, PsycINFO, and MENTAL HEALTH ABSTRACTS. All other citations were found to be unique to each PSYCH category database.

LAW

All 32 bibliographic citations in the LAW subject category were found to be unique citations. Of course, seven of nine citations in CIS were references to Congressional testimony and not expected to be indexed in the other LAW databases.

MEDICINE

In the MEDICINE category, MEDLINE FILE 154 (covering years 1980-1986) had the most postings with 32 hits. Of these only two citations overlapped with the other MEDICINE category databases. Of the 15 postings in the six other MEDICINE databases (cumulatively), nine were unique citations (see Table 2).

COMPARISON BETWEEN SUBJECT CATEGORIES

A comparison of citation overlap among the three subject categories in Example 2 indicated only one common posting between the PSYCH and MEDICINE category, and only one article that overlapped between the LAW and MEDICINE category; there was no overlap of citations between the PSYCH and LAW subject category. Indeed, the "Myxedema Psychosis-Insanity Defense in Homicide" article was the only citation retrieved with any regularity across all the databases for the subject category searches.

DISCUSSION

The interface between the field of psychology and law has created a vast body of knowledge, and this research base has evolved into a boundless bibliographic foundation. Accordingly, the process of literature retrieval has increased in complexity and forensic psychologists are at task to discover novel and efficacious methods when engaged in literature review. The current investigation attempts to demonstrate the effectiveness of utilizing online multi-database search strategies in a comprehensive manner so as to achieve satisfactory results when performing psychological/legal bibliographic inquiry. Clearly, the results of the online retrieval exercises conducted in the current article testify to the utility of conducting a comprehensive database search strategy, such as DIALINDEX. It should also be noted that the two other major online services, SDC and BRS, also provide master database indexes similar to DIALINDEX. The SDC index file is entitled DBI (Data Base Index) and the BRS index file is entitled CROS (Cross-file Searching). By accessing these types of information directories, the researcher can identify a wealth

of information that is easily overlooked with a single database search strategy. Furthermore, since each database follows its own indexing policies and practices, the accuracy of search results will tend to vary between databases when using the same input terms. This is especially notable when using terms that are not found in a citation title but which are used as descriptors or identifiers in some files but not in others. Another reason for variance in bibliographic output is that each database selects "source" journals for indexing, and journal inclusion varies markedly among databases. Also, some databases screen journals for selection of relevant material and, obviously, this practice leads to abridged coverage.

Although the present inquiry did not focus on sophisticated legal databanks such as LEXIS or WESTLAW (see Franklin, 1986), most forensic psychologists have easy access to online services such as DIALOG. Moreover, the bibliographic base of the PSYCH and LAW subject categories in DIALINDEX is quite volumninous and scan the major databases in their respective fields. It is obvious from the current results that limitation of a search to a single database (e.g., PsycINFO) would undoubtedly produce limited bibliographic results. In fact, there was minimal overlap of citations not only <u>across</u> various databases but also <u>between</u> major subject categories. Furthermore, all citations seemed quite pertinent to the research topic and also appeared in well respected sources. These findings suggest that psychological/legal researchers have a professional responsibility to utilize multi-database search strategies in conducting a truly comprehensive bibliography. Forensic psychologists that are proficient with contemporary bibliographic retrieval methods will find their expertise greatly enhanced.

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TABLE 1

Frequency of Postings for descriptors Child Custody and Homosexual/Lesbian in PSYCH and LAW categories in DIALINDEX.

PSYCH CATEGORY DATABASES		FREQUENCY OF POSTINGS (HITS)
FILE 1:	ERIC -66-86/MAR	2
FILE 7:	SOCIAL SCISEARCH - 72-86/WK10	2
FILE 11:	PSYCINFO - 67-86/FEB	8
FILE 37:	SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS - 63-85/ISS6	3
FILE 64:	CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT - SPRING 1985 EDITION	0
FILE 86:	MENTAL HEALTH ABSTRACTS - 69-86/MAR	5
FILE 140:	PSYCALERT/MAR 17, 1986	0
FILE 291:	FAMILY RESOURCES - 70-86/MAR	3

LAW CATEGORY DATABASES		FREQUENCY OF POSTINGS (HITS)
FILE 21:	NCJRS - 1972-86/MAR	1
FILE 64:	CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT - SPRING 1985 EDITION	0
FILE 101:	CIS (Congressional Information Service)-71-86/FEB	0
FILE 150:	LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX - 80-86 MAR	6
FILE 171:	CRIMINAL JUSTICE PERIODICAL INDEX -75-86/FEB	22
FILE 243:	PATLAW - 67-86/MAR	0
FILE 244:	LABORLAW - 61-86/MAR	0

TABLE 2

Frequency of Postings for descriptors Homicide/Murder and Insanity Defense in PSYCH and LAW categories in DIALINDEX.

PSYCH CATEGORY DATABASES		FREQUENCY OF POSTINGS (HITS)
FILE 1:	ERIC -66-86/MAR	0
FILE 7:	SOCIAL SCISEARCH - 72-86/WK10	1
FILE 11:	PSYCINFO - 67-86/FEB	13
FILE 37:	SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS - 63-85/ISS6	1
FILE 64:	CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT - SPRING 1986 EDITION	0
FILE 86:	MENTAL HEALTH ABSTRACTS - 69-86/MAR	3
FILE 140:	PSYCALERT/APR 21, 1986	0
FILE 291:	FAMILY RESOURCES - 70-86/MAR	0

LAW CATEGORY DATABASES		FREQUENCY OF POSTINGS (HITS)
FILE 21:	NCJRS - 1972-86/MAR	18
FILE 64:	CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT - SPRING 1985 EDITION	0
FILE 101:	CIS (Congressional Information Service)-71-86/FEB	9
FILE 150:	LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX - 80-86 MAR	3
FILE 171:	CRIMINAL JUSTICE PERIODICAL INDEX -75-86/FEB	2
FILE 243:	PATLAW - 67-86/MAR	0
FILE 244:	LABORLAW - 61-86/MAR	0

TABLE 2 (continued)

MEDICINE CATEGORY DATABASES		FREQUENCY OF POSTINGS (HITS)
FILE 5:	BIOSIS PREVIEWS 81-86/MAY BA8110;RMM 3010	3
FILE 55:	BIOSIS PREVIEWS - 177 thru 1980	0
FILE 255:	BIOSIS PREVIEWS - 1969 thru 1976	0
FILE 34:	SCISEARCH - 84-86/WK16	0
FILE 87:	SCISEARCH - 81-83	0
FILE 94:	SCISEARCH - 78-80	1
FILE 186:	SCISEARCH - 74-77	0
FILE 72:	EMBASE (EXCERPTA MEDICA) 82-86/ISS12	2
FILE 73:	EMBASE (EXCERPTA MEDICA) IN PROCESS 86/WK16	2
FILE 172:	EMBASE (EXCERPTA MEDICA) 1980-81	1
FILE 173:	EMBASE (EXCERPTA MEDICA) 1975-79	0
FILE 218:	NURSING & ALLIED HEALTH (CINAHL) - 83-36/FEB	0
FILE 219:	CLINICAL ABSTRACTS - JAN81-86/MAY	0
FILE 74:	INTERNATIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL ABS. - 70-86/APR	0
FILE 152:	MEDLINE - 66-72	0
FILE 153:	MEDLINE - 73-79	6
FILE 154:	MEDLINE - 80-86/JUN	32